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A FORECAST OF MR. GLADSTONE'S NEW ADMINISTRATION.

BY JUSTIN McCARTHY, M. P.

"THE situation is the most complicated, and in many respects the most interesting that has occurred in the Parliamentary history of these islands." In these words a friend, who is a distinguished member of the House of Lords, writes to me about the crisis through which Great Britain and Ireland have just been passing—the crisis of the General Elections. Nothing can be more just than the estimate of the situation expressed in the words which I have just quoted. It is one of the most complicated and one of the most interesting political situations that have ever occurred in our Parliamentary history. A great political party has fallen—a party which came in six years ago fortified by one of the strongest numerical majorities that have ever in our time sustained an administration. All through the course of the six years' Parliament that majority kept dwindling away. At almost every bye-election—that is, an election caused by a death, or a resignation, or an appointment to office of some kind, judicial or otherwise, which did not permit the retention of a seat in the House of Commons—the government lost a vote and the opposition under Mr. Gladstone gained one. This process went on so fast and so far that the opposition began to feel convinced that whenever the general elections came around Mr. Gladstone would be sure to have a tremendous, an overwhelming majority at the polls. The elections have come and gone, and have not justified these expectations. The Tory government, of course, was defeated; that everyone on either side knew was certain to be the result, but the Liberals have not anything like the majority they expected. In fact, but for the Irish National party they would not have any majority at all—they would be low down in a minority. Now, let us look at the importance of this fact. I

shall do my best to look at it with the calm, unprejudiced eye of an outer observer, if I can, and shall try not to let my partizan feelings guide me in any way as regards my estimate of realities and of the existing situation.

The Liberal party will have an ample majority for carrying ordinary measures of reform and for maintaining themselves in office and in power. But they draw that majority from Ireland, and the first great reform they will have to undertake is the reorganization of the whole system of Irish government—in other words, Home Rule. Mr. Gladstone is pledged to make this his first important measure. No one doubts—I least of all men am likely to doubt—the sincerity of his determination. I am perfectly certain that Mr. Gladstone would not accept office at all at his time of life but for his noble and generous desire to carry Home Rule and so settle the Irish question. If he had a great English majority behind him he would have no real difficulty in accomplishing that object. But the result of the elections suggests some serious difficulties in the way, not of the final triumph of Home Rule—about that no reasonable man can have any serious doubt—but about the immediate result. For it is certain that the House of Lords will be greatly emboldened to throw out a Home Rule Bill by the fact that the majority in favor of Home Rule is not found in England or in Scotland or in Wales, but in Ireland. I wish to make myself clear upon this point. A majority of the Scottish representatives and of the Welsh representatives are undoubtedly in favor of Home Rule, but these are not numerically strong enough to counterbalance the numbers of the English Tories.

The truth is that we have not even yet got a fair chance of ascertaining at an election the views of the majority of the English people—or even of the English voters. In the meantime, however, the House of Lords will unquestionably take courage from the fact that the majority which returns Mr. Gladstone and the Liberals to office is a majority composed of Irish Nationalist members. If the Irish Nationalist members could be induced to withdraw their support from Mr. Gladstone he would have to go out of office. Of course the great argument of the Anti-Home Rulers has been that Great Britain and Ireland are all one, and that there is no need for a separate system of Irish legislation. On this principle it would be logically absurd to say that a majority of Irishmen in favor of Mr. Gladstone ought to

count for less than a majority of Englishmen. But the Lords will not reverence logic or shrink from absurdity. They will say: "We already knew the opinion of the Irish members. We knew they were for separation and rebellion and flat burglary and all the rest of it. What we wanted to know was the opinion of Great Britain; and, lo and behold you, here we have it, in the fact that Mr. Gladstone's majority is not drawn from Great Britain, but from Ireland. Why, then, should we hesitate to throw out a measure which has not the support of the majority of the people of Great Britain, and has only the support of a majority of our hereditary enemies, the people of Ireland?"

Now undoubtedly this is an inconvenient position for Mr. Gladstone to be placed in. The House of Lords in the end can easily be disposed of, Suppose Mr. Gladstone were to send up the Home Rule measure—having carried it successfully through the Commons—the House of Lords would no doubt throw it out. What would Mr. Gladstone do then? Appeal to the country against the House of Lords, many people here have been saying—have another general election and see if the popular vote would not further strengthen him. Now in my opinion Mr. Gladstone will do nothing of the kind. I am convinced that he will not allow to the House of Lords the honor and glory of dictating to the country the time when there is to be a general re-election of a representative chamber. Whatever he may do, that I feel convinced he will not do. He can send up a new Home Rule Bill in the next session—the same bill cannot be introduced twice in one session—and then if the House of Lords should threaten to reject it a second time he can retaliate on the House with the menace of the creation of new peers—a sufficient number of new peers to out-top the combined numerical strength of those who are opposed to Home Rule. When once a Prime Minister can make announcement that the Sovereign has authorized him to undertake a fresh creation of peers for a special purpose there is an end to the controversy. The existing peers hold out no longer. Why should they? What would be the good? The measure which they detested would be carried in either case—only if they stood out they would have to submit to the introduction of a crowd of new peers into their sacred chamber. The threat therefore is quite enough. The "gone coon" of the peerage always comes down. The menace has never

been made in my days. It was last made as a means of compelling the peers to pass the great Reform Bill of 1832. I do not think it is likely that we shall be compelled to have recourse to anything of the kind in 1892.

Therefore I take it for granted that when the end comes the peers will quietly give in and allow the Home Rule measure to pass. In the meantime, however, there must be a delay if, as I fully expect, the House of Lords should muster up the courage to throw out the Home Rule Bill on its first presentation to them. Then Mr. Gladstone would probably call an early sitting of the next session and bring in the bill again. But something could be done in the meantime, and that is just the question which I wish my readers to consider. We suppose the House of Lords to have thrown out the Home Rule Bill on its first introduction. What can Mr. Gladstone propose to do in the meantime?

I may perhaps be allowed to explain to American readers that our way of conducting an election here is quite unlike anything known in the United States. We do not hold our general elections on one and the same day throughout these two islands; we do not anywhere close the public houses, but on the contrary we leave them open and in full swing; and we allow to a voter as many votes as he has property or other qualification to secure to him. A voter in England may have a vote out of his place of business in the City of London—the city, properly so called—that part of London which is under the municipal jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor. He may have another vote for his dwelling-house in the West End of London. He has perhaps a country house in one of the shires, and he has a vote because of that. He may have two or three country houses, and he is entitled to a vote for each in the electoral division to which it belongs. He has a shooting place in Scotland—and he gets a vote in the Scottish division for that. He has a hunting place in one of the great English hunting counties, and he has a vote for that. There is no limit but the limit of property and possession to the number of votes a man may have in these countries. Our system of allowing the elections to be held on all manner of different days makes this plurality of votes a substantial reality. A voter thus happily endowed has plenty of time to make practical use of his privilege.

The late elections have covered something like a fortnight of time. According to our electoral law the writs or warrants for

the holding of elections are issued by the Speaker at Westminster and are sent to all the constituencies. They are not quite indeterminate as to time—the elections must be taken within a smaller number of days in boroughs and a larger number of days in counties. But the law is sufficiently vague to leave a very considerable margin of days at the discretion of the local authorities. If you are a candidate for a parliamentary seat in Great Britain or Ireland you may be elected on the first or second day this week, while your friend and colleague in a parliamentary party does not have his fate decided until the end of the week following. The local authorities are usually supporters of the party in power, and they will naturally fix the days of voting to suit the convenience of their own friends. Therefore we may be sure that if in some county division rather remote from London there are several voters who live habitually in London, and who have votes in divisions near London, the arrangements will be so made as to give them ample time to get down to the remoter constituency and record their votes. In this way the plurality of votes comes to be a serious thing. A return of majorities is only a return of a majority of votes and not of a majority of voters. It is quite possible to have a majority of votes without a majority of voters. It is quite possible to have a political party sent into power by a majority of votes without a majority of voters.

I need hardly point out that this tells heavily against the Liberal party. The great strength of that party is found in the working democracy—and the artizans in the towns and the peasants on the lands do not as a rule have many different properties, and many different parks and pleasances in England, and shooting-boxes in Scotland and fishing-lodges in Wales, and town-houses in the West End of London. Therefore there has been of late years a strong wave of popular feeling swelling up against this plural vote system which gives plurality to property and to property only ; and it has taken the definite form of demand for the system of One Man, One Vote. The first great reform, after Home Rule, to which the Radical party will apply itself will be the reform which gives to each man, rich or poor, one vote and one vote only. We shall no doubt come to have all our general elections held on the same day ; but if we had got rid of the plurality of votes the one day for all the elections would be a matter of very minor importance.

Another necessary and imperative reform is a change in the system of registration. "Tedious it were to tell, and hard to hear," as Shakespeare's Petruchio says, if I were to attempt to explain to American readers the tortuosities of our registration system—the system of record which finally affirms a man's right to have a vote. It is enough to say that although a voter may be perfectly entitled to his vote he has to fight his corner and prove his case at every annual registration, or he loses his vote—if any one objects to having his vote recorded. It is an annual case of proving over and over again your right to what is your own. Now what the Liberals say is—it ought to be the duty of the local authorities to secure a man's right whether he is able to attend the registration court and bear witness to it or not. The local authorities have no difficulty in finding out whether a man is or is not bound to pay so much a year in taxes and so much a year in poor-rates. They take very good care that each person so liable shall pay up his taxes and his rates.

Now all the Liberals ask is that the same parental authority which kindly, but firmly, ascertains whether a man is or is not liable to pay so much to the State and the parish, and finding him liable does at once proceed to enforce the liability, shall also take care that if his name ought to appear on the list of voters, his name shall appear there without any cost, trouble, or loss of time on his part. Not a very unreasonable demand in the way of reform, most Americans would doubtless say. No; not a very unreasonable demand, but a demand of the utmost importance in this country where whole masses of voters among the poorer classes are disfranchised every year because they have not the time to look after the business of their registration and the opponents of their political party find time enough to organize an opposition to their registration in their absence. The two reforms I have spoken of would give expression for the first time to the real political sentiments of the vast majority of the people of England.

As I write, just after the elections are over, or practically over, there are two opinions among members of the Liberal party—I speak now of genuine Liberals. There are a few men who think that Mr. Gladstone would do wisely to put off Home Rule for a short time and to pass a measure for One Man, One Vote, and another measure for improved registration, and having secured

these reforms as a preliminary condition then to bring in the Home Rule Bill. Of course, if we had these preliminary reforms passed the Home Rule Bill would be a foregone conclusion. I know that Radicals as advanced as Mr. Labouchere, for example, are in favor of this course of proceeding. Therefore I feel bound to treat the suggestion with all manner of seriousness and all manner of respect. Nevertheless it will not do, and I feel convinced that Mr. Gladstone has no intention of adopting any such course of policy. Home Rule must come on before anything else. Mr. Gladstone lost office for the sake of Home Rule, he has regained office because of Home Rule and he knows that the people of Ireland, and the vast Irish population of the United States and Canada and Australia, look to him to inaugurate his return to power by introducing a measure for the setting up of Home Rule in Ireland. I take it for granted that this is what he will do. On that point I cannot admit into my own mind any manner of doubt. But there is not the slightest reason why, when his ministry gets to actual work, he should not himself introduce a Home Rule scheme on one day, and others of his colleagues introduce a One Man, One Vote bill and a reformed registration bill the same day or the day after. The bills could then follow in each other's steps easily enough, and if Mr. Gladstone should not be able to force his Home Rule Bill through the House of Lords on the very first rush, he might easily secure the passing of the other measures which would make Home Rule, at the next time of its introduction, a matter of certainty and of easy success.

There is another way of doing the work. Mr. Gladstone may bring in a Home Rule bill in the first session of the new Parliament. He has majority enough—quite enough—to carry his bill through the House of Commons. It goes up to the Lords, and the Lords, as I have said, reject it. Then Mr. Gladstone could call another session very early, and bring in the Home Rule Bill again; and meantime the country would be roused to such an agitation against the House of Lords that the peers would feel they must either give in or give out. The peers would feel—must know—that if they were to carry resistance any farther, there would be an uprising of public opinion before which the House of Lords would go down like an Alpine village before an avalanche. The House of Lords, as a political institution, holds on to existence by a very slender thread. We all remember the

story of the very old lady who talked to Fontenelle, still older, about the kindliness of death in having passed them over for so long a time. "Hush, madame," Fontenelle replied; "don't remind Death—he may only have forgotten us." I should think the saner members of the House of Lords would feel somewhat as Fontenelle felt, and would be inclined to urge that public opinion might not be compelled to remember the existence of the hereditary chamber.

By such a process as this, Home Rule might be carried even without the necessity of waiting for the full operation of such measures as the establishment of the principle of One Man, One Vote and the much-needed reform in the system of registration. But in the meanwhile I hope and believe that the Liberal government, when it has fairly settled itself in office, will introduce all three reforms as nearly as possible side by side. When I say as nearly as possible side by side, I mean that I hope and believe the first place will be given to Home Rule, the next to One Man, One Vote, and the third to a better system of registration. Then if the Lords throw out the Home Rule Bill—or rather, I should say, when the Lords had thrown out the Home Rule Bill—the other measures of reform might be carried. The Lords would hardly venture to reject three great popular measures in one session, and there would be easy work for the Liberals in the following year.

Nothing could be more curious than the kind of talk which has been heard lately among some of the supporters of the Tory government. It has been heard even from the mouths of practical Tory politicians, who ought to know much better. Why, they ask, should Lord Salisbury resign? Why should he regard a vote of no-confidence or a vote of censure passed against him by a majority of forty-two? Forty-two is not a very great majority, as numbers in Parliament now go. Why should he not stick on and refuse to leave office until some definite and practical measure of his is thrown out by the House of Commons? The younger Pitt sat on, supported by his Sovereign, in defiance of many a majority of the House of Commons. So he did; but we have a good deal outgrown the times of the younger Pitt; and the present Sovereign of England is not in the least likely to try to revive the arbitrary days of George the Third. The time when any Sovereign could venture to uphold a defeated ministry against a majority of the House of Commons expired with George the

Fourth—or, at all events, with William the Fourth. We may take it for granted that Queen Victoria, who has been the model of a constitutional sovereign, will not listen for one moment to the crazy suggestions which some speakers and writers, who profess to be devoted loyalists, are spontaneously offering to her. Nor do I believe for an instant that Lord Salisbury or Mr. Balfour could be influenced by such preposterous counsel. I am writing in anticipation of events, but I venture thus far to assume the strain of the prophet. There will be no attempt made to set aside by ministerial pertinacity or by royal will the decision of the constituencies of Great Britain and Ireland. Whatever else may happen, that will not happen. There will be every effort made, of course, on the part of the Conservatives, to prevent the Liberal majority from carrying out their purposes of reform, but it will be by side-strokes, and not by a *coup d' état.*

There is one possibility which nobody here seems to be considering, but which yet I venture to think is worthy of consideration. How, if the Tory statesmen were to admit that their Local Government Bill for Ireland, introduced and abandoned last session, had failed to give satisfaction to Parliament and were to undertake to bring in a much wider bill, with an intimation—sent round by whisper and by private interview—that it might be hammered in committee into a genuine measure of Home Rule, which they, the Tories, could easily pass through the House of Lords? The House of Lords would swallow anything coming from a Tory government, and so all trouble would be saved.

Were Disraeli living now, and in any manner of physical strength, this, I have very little doubt, is the way in which he would manage to outflank his opponents. This is exactly what he did, when, having in 1866 defeated Mr. Gladstone's Reform Bill by the aid of some secessionist Liberals and turned Mr. Gladstone out of office, he himself in 1867 brought in another reform bill and carried it by the help of Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright. Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright wanted a good measure of suffrage reform and did not care who carried it as long as it was carried. Mr. Gladstone now wants to see Home Rule carried, and does not, I am sure, care who has the nominal honor of carrying it, if only it is carried. But then, Disraeli has long been dead, and Lord Salisbury is the leader of the Conservative party.

JUSTIN MCCARTHY.